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ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 1980s, Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) in Michigan played a leadership role in three multi-partner coalitions: Education for Employment (EFE); the Southwest Michigan Coalition for Tech Prep (SMCTP); and the Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality (KVPQ). In the EFE partnership, KVCC works with the Kalamazoo Valley Intermediate School District and its nine constituent public school districts, as well as business and industry, to help prepare K-14 students for the world of work. In elementary school, students are exposed to work-habit skills; in middle school, they participate in career exploration activities; and in high school, EFE students are introduced to "Tech Prep," a 6-year technical-training program beginning in 9th grade, and ending after 2 years at KVCC. The SMCTP is a 14-member alliance among KVCC, 4 sister community colleges, and representatives of 9 intermediate school districts, whose members share knowledge and resources to improve Tech Prep programs. The KVPQ, formed partly in response to the planned closure of a local General Motors plant, is an alliance of job training providers, the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce, and the Creating Economic Opportunity Council. The KVPQ's goals are to better meet the training and retraining needs of businesses, to help promote economic development, and to give public and private organizations a mechanism for investing in the community's overall training needs. The KVPQ's initial grant from the Michigan Department of Education will allow the consortium to retrain 1,368 employees at 4 area industries. (PAA)

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PARTNERS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Partners in Workforce Development

Whatever you can do, I can do better
I can do anything better than you

Those lyrics might be the right tune on the baseball field and in the business world, but in the public arena they might be counterproductive and promote inefficiency.

Especially in this era of scarce resources when public agencies such as educational institutions may have the go-it-alone tendency to duplicate services in the name of competition.

In Kalamazoo County and Southwest Michigan, the lesson learned is that strength amasses through cooperation. This strength emanated from top education and business leaders who had the courage to face squarely their future and question the innate purposes of their institutions:

QUESTION: What do students and customers have in common?

ANSWER: They should both come first.

From that commitment in the second half of the 1980s sprang three multi-partner coalitions aimed at giving first-class treatment to students, customers, and eventually to the community and its economic vitality.

The three programs in which Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) played leadership roles are: Education for Employment (EFE), the Southwest Michigan Coalition for Tech Prep, and the Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality.

Education for Employment

The genesis for the EFE partnership partly evolved from concerns among K-12 schools about duplicating expensive vocational programs that attracted small enrollments. At the same time, leaders in business and industry were saying that too many students were coming out of schools without the skills, abilities, traits and knowledge to make proficient workers and to succeed in society.

Working with the Kalamazoo Valley Intermediate School District (KVISD) and its nine constituent public school districts, KVCC helped mobilize education, business and industry into a consortium to prepare K-14 students for the world of work.

EFE, which is being researched by the U.S. Department of Labor as a model school-to-work program, begins at the elementary-school level where students are exposed to work-habit skills such as responsibility, dependability, positive attitude, following directions and safety procedures.

As they enter the middle school, students are introduced to technology education. They are given insights into technology, its evolution, utilization, significance and impact on society. Students working in groups take part in hands-on, problem-solving activities.

In addition to gaining an overview of technology education, middle-school students participate in career-exploration activities. Career-cluster approaches are designed to give students very practical, hands-on exposures to several job fields, such as marketing, law enforcement, child care, health occupations,

graphic arts, hotel and hospitality, construction trades, secretarial and clerical, accounting/computing, welding, agriculture, auto mechanics, manufacturing, business and data processing, machine tool, commercial design, electro-mechanical technology, and drafting.

This exposure helps identify their interests and aptitudes, and encourages them to begin making appropriate choices for their high school curriculum. The career-cluster and career-awareness components culminate with a visit to a Career Day on the KVCC campus.

As students leave the middle school and embark on the last phase of their K-12 education, they are introduced to Tech Prep, a six-year, technical-training program that begins in the ninth grade and ends after two years at KVCC.

"Tech Prep: 4 + 2 = Success" is designed for all secondary students who want to begin work in a technical field or who want to use Tech Prep experience to prepare for more intensive education.

In Tech Prep, a mentorship is added to continue the career-awareness emphasis and help students narrow their focus on a career track. After choosing a career interest, sophomores are matched to a mentor in business/industry for an informational visit for a job-shadowing experience.

By the 10th grade, students can enroll in a vocational-technical curriculum and can take courses in one of 22 programs offered countywide:

Health and Human Services -- cardio-respiratory care, dental

hygiene, fire science, law enforcement, nursing and medical assistant technology;

Industrial Technology -- automotive, chemical technology, design and general drafting, electrical technology, electronics, environmental control and service, machine tool, mechanical engineering, plastics technology, technical communications and art, and welding, cutting and fabrication;

Business -- accounting, business administration, data processing (operations and programming), marketing, administrative secretary, and legal and medical secretary.

These programs -- mostly two years in duration -- are offered both within the school setting and in the business/industry community. The second year may include an apprenticeship, cooperative education or an internship experience.

Students enrolling in EFE vocational-technical programs additionally learn employability skills and basic academics as an integral part of the curriculum. These vocational-technical students are expected to accomplish specific job-related tasks, are required to take a competency test at the completion of each year, and must earn a passport listing their acquired skills after successfully completing program requirements.

In addition to hosting the Career Day, KVCC houses EFE's Guidance/Assessment/Placement (GAP) Center where vocational-technical students can further explore career interests and aptitudes, and can take advantage of a computerized, countywide job-placement service.

EFE is also extended to students enrolled in adult- and community-education programs throughout Kalamazoo County, and includes an emphasis on gender equity to ease the path of students who are interested in careers not traditionally filled by members of their sex.

Southwest Michigan Coalition for Tech Prep

A belief in strength through numbers and in collaboration instead of competition generated this effort to increase the awareness and effectiveness of Tech Prep programs in this part of Michigan.

The 14-member alliance included KVCC and its sister community colleges of Glen Oaks, Kellogg, Lake Michigan and Southwestern Michigan. Representing K-12 interests were KVISD and intermediate school districts serving Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties.

Meeting under the auspices of KVCC in Kalamazoo, the coalition was energized after hearing presentations from Dale Parnell, a commissioner for Oregon Community College Services, Robert Schiller, Michigan's superintendent of public instruction, and other leading voices in the Tech Prep movement.

The coalition organized to share members' knowledge and energy at monthly planning sessions, and to improve the effectiveness of Tech Prep programs. To accomplish this, the members pledged:

(1) To share what each learns as Tech Prep programs are implemented and developed in each's area.

(2) To jointly seek ways to involve business, industry and

labor in developing and implementing Tech Prep programs.

(3) To designate at least 5 percent of the alliance's Tech Prep grants for cooperative coalition activities, especially those in curriculum and professional development.

The community colleges also pledged to work out articulation agreements in occupational/vocational programs to facilitate the transition from high school to post-secondary education, and to ease the shift from one community college to another in the pursuit of technical training.

Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality

The marketplace has gone global.

To position Southwest Michigan enterprises to compete on that scale, all segments of the community -- K-12 and higher education, business, industry, the human services, government, labor and management -- needed to collaborate on long-range economic-development strategies.

One of those strategies is to provide a quality workforce -- employees who are dependable, enthusiastic, honest, drug-free, upbeat, adaptable, trustworthy, aware of community and the times, and who approach their jobs as problem-solvers, not problem-causers.

Education and business needed to join forces in teaching not only the state-of-the-art technical and quality-control skills now required in the constantly changing workplace, but human-relations and communications skills as well to improve worker efficiency, productivity and morale.

The need for retraining moved up the ladder of priorities with the front-page news in early 1993 that General Motors, the Kalamazoo community's second-largest employer with a workforce of 3,500, will be shutting down its Buick-Oldsmobile-Cadillac stamping plant in mid-1995.

National vendors that do business with Kalamazoo area enterprises are demanding -- in the name of their own global competitiveness -- that the local entities follow their lead in implementing such tactics as Total Quality Management and in adopting international standards. To keep these local businesses competitive and this region's economy strong and vital, their workers need retraining in these techniques.

The community's training/retraining function had to be more firmly organized, be expanded in scope, and become proactive in its approach. By contacting companies in advance to identify their on-the-horizon training needs, it may be possible to head off future GM-like situations before the trauma of an immense, negative economic impact.

To insure that the region's economic vitality was not being sapped by a poor-quality workforce, the major institutions and organizations charged with this responsibility formed a non-profit alliance.

They pursued an agreement based on three objectives:

(1) To better meet the training and retraining needs of existing and new businesses.

(2) To help promote economic development through this

function.

(3) To give public and private organizations a mechanism for investing in the community's overall training needs, which can then be met in a synchronized, coordinated fashion instead of being crisis-oriented.

The workforce-development consortium formalized with the signing of an agreement on Sept. 15, 1992. The pact will be effective through September of 1997. Through a single contact, Southwest Michigan entrepreneurs and economic developers can be in touch with the spectrum of the community's training resources. It amounts to one-stop shopping for quickly and effectively retooling the workforce.

The partnership's training providers -- WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY (enrollment -- 25,600)), KALAMAZOO VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE (enrollment -- 11,500), KALAMAZOO COLLEGE (enrollment -- 1,200) and its STRYKER MANAGEMENT CENTER, DAVENPORT COLLEGE (enrollment -- 1,500), and KALAMAZOO VALLEY INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT (11 K-12 school systems with a combined enrollment of nearly 40,000 students) -- joined forces with the Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce and the CEO (Creating Economic Opportunity) Council, a newly restructured, broad-based, economic-development initiative formed to maintain the community's job base and to spur growth in employment opportunities.

The resulting alliance, endorsed by local governments, seeks to foster economic-development efforts by improving the quality and adaptability of the workforce. Members of the Kalamazoo Valley

Partners for Quality can utilize any of their collective institutes and programs as training/retraining resources.

By working together to provide a central resource for the economic-development efforts of the CEO Council and local/state agencies, the Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality will position the community to respond to training requests without delay.

During the formative period, Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Downtown Center (in the city of Kalamazoo) was chosen by the alliance members to serve as the coordinating agency.

One of the consortium's initial services was to assess the immediate training needs of companies that want to cope with the 21st Century market, either on their own or as a goods-and-services provider for multi-national corporations facing stiffer competition. The frequent consensus was that training was needed in the quality processes, in management techniques, in technical skills, and in areas of human relations and communications.

The consortium membership divided into three groups to pursue the partnership's objectives. Each group has a specific function:

* To respond to training requests.
* To determine the allocation of training funds that are received.
* To coordinate and implement a marketing campaign.

According to the partnership contract, when requests for training are received, the partners (by simple majority) decide whether the response will be as a joint venture on behalf of the entire consortium or as individual proposals from each partner

interested in conducting the training. In every case, the company will pick the training provider. Requests for training funds are handled similarly.

With the Kalamazoo Valley Community College Foundation acting as the consortium's fiscal agent during the inaugural year, the Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality entered statewide competition for employee-retraining funds under the Adult Education Alternative Training Grant Program through the Michigan Department of Education.

The request for $284,238 was approved, allowing the consortium to address the training needs of 1,368 employees at four area industries -- James River Corp., ABEX-NWL Aerospace Co., Kalamazoo Stamping & Die Co., and MARO Inc.

James Rivers is planning a $3-million investment to upgrade its manufacturing of specialty papers used in wrapping food products. The investment will save a minimum of 130 jobs at one of James Rivers' Kalamazoo-area plants and provide employment opportunities for nearly 300 when fully operative.

To make the operation as competitive as possible in a global market, James River will form eight high-performance, team-management work groups. Their members will be exposed to technical training on 56 pieces of sophisticated manufacturing equipment, to interpersonal and social training, and to administrative-organizational training.

By illustrating that this kind of team-building approach can produce quality products in the most efficient, effective and safe

manner in Michigan, the Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality is confident that the corporation's future plans for expansion will include its Kalamazoo County holdings.

ABEX, Kalamazoo Stamping & Die, and MARO are local suppliers to such national vendors as General Motors, Ford, General Dynamics and Boeing. They must react to workforce developments taking place at those global concerns. To meet the increasing competition, these worldwide corporations are shifting their business approaches to take advantage of Total Quality Management, Statistical Process Control, cross-training in a variety of disciplines, and self-directed work teams that synchronize and coordinate the manufacturing process.

While helping to strengthen their own economic positions locally, the retraining of employees at these three feeder industries will also assist the nation's major manufacturers in retaining their competitive positions around the world.

The consortium submitted a proposal for a second round of funding to assist five other local companies in this kind of retraining and to help them meet international standards for product quality. It, too, was approved.

The five-year agreement calls for consortium leadership and coordinating responsibilities to shift yearly among its members. While they are committed to sharing the underwriting of the collaboration's costs, its effectiveness will be increased through an administrative structure that is well-defined.

As stated earlier, the community's training/retraining

function will be more firmly established, expanded in scope, and be proactive in nature. Funds are being sought for a project director and sufficient clerical assistance to accomplish this over the next four years as the community reacts to the loss of the 3,500 General Motors jobs and the ripple effect from that impact.

The need for a more structured, anticipatory and organized mechanism came into focus with the GM announcement. A special task force of business and civic leaders has forged a community response to soften the impact of the plant shutdown and job losses on the local economy.

One of five subgroups formed by the Community Economic Response Team (CERT) has been assigned the training and retraining of the displaced workers. That ball is now in the court of the Kalamazoo Valley Partners for Quality, which is including the Michigan Employment Security Commission, the United Auto Workers, and the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service in the response process. The affected GM workers will be surveyed to determine their needs in the transition, to explain to them the training resources available in the community, and to offer instructions in such basics as resume writing, job seeking and entrepreneurship.

By contacting companies in advance to identify their training needs, it may be possible to head off future GM-like situations.

A training/retraining consortium that merges a community's educational and economic-development missions offers a model that can be easily adopted in other regions. When it adds the feature

of a proactive strategy that could prevent plant shutdowns, it should be replicated.